

Training for Today's Security Challenges

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"The Marine Corps, as the nation's force in readiness, must have the versatility and flexibility to deal with a situation at any intensity across the entire spectrum of conflict."<sup>1</sup> Today's security environment presents the Marine Corps with unique challenges, from catastrophic to irregular, across the spectrum of conflict. The Marine Corps' doctrinal foundation of Expeditionary Maneuver warfare and task organization of the MAGTF make it uniquely qualified to meet these challenges. The most effective manner in which to counter these threats is to maintain an organizational focus on the application of the fundamentals of maneuver warfare at the general war end of the spectrum.

### **Current and Future Threats**

The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, published in March of 2005, categorizes the following "mature and emerging challenges":

- **Traditional** challenges are posed by states employing recognized military capabilities and forces in well-understood forms of military competition and conflict.
- **Irregular** challenges come from those employing "unconventional" methods to counter the *traditional* advantages of stronger opponents.
- **Catastrophic** challenges involve the acquisition, possession, and use of WMD or methods producing WMD-like effects.
- **Disruptive** challenges may come from adversaries who develop and use breakthrough technologies to negate current U.S. advantages in key operational domains.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> MCDP 1, *Warfighting* (June 1997), 27.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Defense, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2005 (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2005), 2-3.

The U.S. industrial and technological capacity has enabled the military to maintain dominance in traditional warfare for the past five decades. This dominance has forced potential adversaries to adapt their tactics and focus on irregular, catastrophic, or disruptive capabilities. These capabilities, employed individually or as a combination, in concert with a traditional capability pose a unique challenge. This adaptation has been evident in Operation Iraqi Freedom where the Marine Corps initially faced a traditional threat that once defeated, transitioned to an irregular style of warfare. The Commandant of the Marine Corps recently published guidance on his vision of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Marine Corps. He believes the Marine Corps must maintain its ability to fight across the spectrum of conflict to respond to a future that will be characterized by irregular wars. Additionally, he provides his intent of relying on the "fundamental tenets of Expeditionary maneuver warfare and combined-arms air-ground task forces"<sup>3</sup> in order to achieve his vision.<sup>4</sup>

### **Expeditionary Nature**

The expeditionary nature and task organization of Marine forces makes them ideally suited to counter today's threats. The challenges of today's security environment demand a flexible

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<sup>3</sup> General M.W. Hagee, ALMAR 018/05, April 18, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> General M.W. Hagee, ALMAR 018/05, April 18, 2005.

response force that can operate across the spectrum of conflict from humanitarian assistance to major theater war. Power projection remains an important element of this response force and must be credible in order to retain its viability. The organization of Marine forces into MAGTF's provides this credible force.

The MAGTF provides a combatant commander the ability to project the threat or use of a military force to achieve political objectives. This force must have the ability to conduct forcible entry as well as sustained operations ashore if needed. The irregular warfare threat poses a unique challenge to any force that will be used in a power projection role. Not only must it be able to counter an asymmetrical threat, it must also be prepared to respond to an escalation of violence. If a force is designed solely to respond to threats at the lower end of the spectrum an escalation of violence could be disastrous. A force designed solely to respond to the higher end of the spectrum will be incapable of defeating an irregular threat. The major draw-down of U.S. forces following World War II and the subsequent conflict on the Korean peninsula provides an excellent example of too narrow a focus. Following the Allied victory in World War II, the military was used primarily as an occupation force. As events began to unfold in the spring of 1950, an escalation of forces was necessary in order to counter

the threat posed by North Korea. The ensuing events with near fatal consequences proved that escalation was much more difficult than anticipated. Major General Robert H. Scales Jr. examines this phenomenon in his book, Yellow Smoke: The Future of Land Warfare for America's Military.<sup>5</sup> In the book, he states "troops properly trained to fight-full scale war always perform well in less demanding contingencies...However, experience with the performance of troops thrown into combat in Korea, after years of constabulary service in Japan, suggest that the reverse does not apply."<sup>6</sup> A living, breathing, thinking enemy will attempt to determine the capability of a force and adjust his tactics accordingly. The MAGTF provides a force that can respond to and defeat both threats through maneuver warfare.

### **Maneuver Warfare**

Maneuver warfare is "a warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope."<sup>7</sup> This philosophy guides actions from the highest level commander down to the fireteam leader. A critical component to maneuver warfare is combined arms. In order to become

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<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Scales Jr., *Yellow Smoke: The Future of Land Warfare for America's Military* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), xii.

<sup>6</sup> Scales, *Yellow Smoke*, xii.

<sup>7</sup> MCDP 1 Warfighting p. 73

proficient in the employment of combined arms, a building block approach should be used.

A basic understanding of the characteristics and employment considerations of a unit's organic weapons systems is the first element. Once this is accomplished, the integration of the weapons systems to achieve combined arms effects can be taught and trained to a standard. The next step is introducing inorganic weapons and their employment considerations. Higher level training exercises are designed to provide training and proficiency in the integration of these weapons systems, as well as an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the different elements of the MAGTF. Finally, the introduction of non-traditional "weapons" can be employed, such as the various elements of information operations and non-kinetic fire support assets. This approach to teaching combined arms, focused at the high intensity end of the spectrum, provides a basic understanding of the concept and the flexibility that is required in order to integrate emerging technologies and the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP's) that are a result of lessons learned from the current operating environment. These factors contribute to a Marine's ability to adapt to an unfamiliar situation and continue to apply the fundamental concepts of maneuver warfare.

## **Training and Education**

The key component to the application of the fundamental concepts is a focus on the training, education, and equipping of the individual Marine. As potential adversaries continue to adapt their tactics in order to counter a traditional style of warfare, the battlefield will become more dispersed and occur more frequently in complex terrain. Major General Scales delineates this point in an article on urban warfare in which he states "these enemies learned with each combat encounter that the surest way to gain an advantage is to negate American big-war technologies by moving the fight into complex terrain such as jungles, mountains, and most recently cities."<sup>8</sup> General Scales contends that current and future threats attempt to achieve decisive action by focusing on America's most vulnerable center of gravity: dead American soldiers. In an attempt to exploit this vulnerability, combat has moved into complex terrain where the American advantages of fire superiority and precision weapons are negated. He concludes the most efficient means to counter this adaptation is to form more highly trained, better equipped, and cohesive units with an emphasis on commander's intent and mission tactics.<sup>9</sup> Training and education of small unit leaders in the Marine Corps emphasizes these

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<sup>8</sup> Major General Robert H. Scales Jr., "Urban Warfare: A Soldier's View," *Military Review*, Jan/Feb 2005, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Scales, "Urban Warfare," 9-18.



traits but falls short in indoctrinating these leaders with a true understanding of the fundamental principles of maneuver warfare. Education at the NCO and SNCO level is generally skill based and fails to focus on the doctrine of maneuver warfare. The responsibility rests with unit commanders to ensure their Marines understand and apply the concepts. In order to employ the "Strategic Corporal" effectively and implement future concepts such as distributed operations, a baseline understanding of doctrine must be present. The most effective means to provide this baseline is to expose small unit leaders to scenarios that require the implementation of all kinetic and non-kinetic arms at their disposal, in conjunction with intent, in order to achieve decisive action. This will require that decision-making truly is distributed to the lowest level. The focus on the education of small unit leaders will ensure an understanding of the common operational picture at the lowest level and allow for the implementation of future initiative such as distributed operations.

### **Distributed Operations**

In April of 2005, the Commandant published "A Concept for Distributed Operations."<sup>10</sup> This concept is described as an

Operating approach that will create an advantage over an adversary through the deliberate use of separation and coordinated, interdependent, tactical actions enabled by

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<sup>10</sup> United States Marine Corps, "A Concept for Distributed Operations," Apr 2005.

increased access to functional support, as well as by enhanced combat capabilities at the small-unit level. The essence of this concept lies in the capacity for coordinated action by dispersed units, throughout the breadth and depth of the battlespace, ordered and connected within an operational design focused on a common aim.<sup>11</sup>

Distributed operations are an extension of the maneuver warfare philosophy and are designed as an additional capability for a commander. The concept relies heavily on the improved training, education, and equipping of the individual Marine and his ability to understand the fundamentals of maneuver warfare. The concept envisions a highly dispersed battlefield with small units operating beyond mutual support of direct fire weapons but retaining the ability to mass at the decisive moment. This concept will allow a MAGTF to counter an irregular threat while maintaining the ability to defeat a traditional threat. The training and education of the individual Marine will be critical for success.

If distributed operations are successful, an adaptation of enemy tactics can be expected. As units become more dispersed, the opportunities for the enemy to attempt to mass and achieve decisive action using traditional warfare tactics will become more prevalent. The Marine Corps must anticipate this adaptation and ensure it retains the ability to defeat the threat.

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, "A Concept for Distributed Operations," Apr 2005.

## **Conclusion**

The emerging security challenges faced by the Marine Corps dictate that it retains the ability to defeat an adversary across the entire spectrum of conflict. As the enemy continues to adapt his tactics and as irregular warfare becomes more prevalent, the Marine Corps must resist the temptation to focus training on the lower end of the spectrum and degrade its ability to counter a conventional threat. The greater the success the Marine Corps has in countering irregular warfare, the greater the possibility that a conventional threat will emerge. By ensuring individual Marines understand the fundamentals of maneuver warfare doctrine and can employ them against a conventional threat, the easier it will be to adapt to the uncertainty found in today's security environment.

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